

INTERPRETING HISTORIC DISTRICTS:
USING DIGITAL MEDIA WITHIN A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL TO IMPROVE PUBLIC
APPRECIATION AND SUPPORT FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS
A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE
BY
MARGAUX DEVER

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In February 2016, Michigan's Local Historic District Act was threatened with changes that would make establishing local historic districts more difficult and make dissolving local historic districts easier. Even though studies show the positive effects of historic preservation,¹ this event is one of many that illustrate that the general public does not recognize the value of historic districts. Historic districts are often viewed in light of the regulations that govern them, rather than in light of the historic or architectural significance for which the district was designated.

Many of the challenges and opportunities facing historic preservation in the 21st century begin with communication. Historic preservation cannot be understood in a vacuum; it is an interdisciplinary subject that is informed by aspects of the arts, humanities and sciences but does not fit neatly into any silo. This makes historic preservation difficult to label or "brand" and causes a public relations problem for the historic preservation movement. Presenting historic preservation in an approachable way and communicating the value of historic places is integral to gaining public support. Interpretation is both a form of communication and education. Freeman Tilden, author of *Interpreting our Heritage*, which is the foundational text on interpretation for the National Park Service, distilled the importance of interpretation down to this statement: "through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection."²

¹ Numerous studies have been done on the benefits of historic preservation. For example see Donovan Rypkema, Caroline Cheong, and Randall Mason, *Measuring Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation: A report to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation*, 2nd Ed. (Place Economics, November 2013); David Listokin, Barbara Listokin, and Michael Lahr, "The Contribution of Historic Preservation to Housing and Economic Development," *Housing Policy Debate* 9 no. 3, (Fannie May Foundation, 1998); Marta de la Torre, ed. *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*, (The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002); all available from <http://www.achp.gov/economic-general.html>

² Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage*, 4th ed., (1967; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Historic districts exist because they represent something significant to the community. Interpreting historic districts in a way that is broadly inclusive of community audiences and visitors helps raise awareness about the value of historic districts. The intent of this thesis is to present a model for interpreting historic districts comprehensively that can be adapted to suit the place-specific needs of many kinds of historic districts using digital methods in conjunction with other interpretive methods.

OVERVIEW

This thesis proposes that, by raising awareness and educating the public through a multi-platform approach that uses digital media to interpret historic districts, the general public will gain a better understanding and appreciation of the value of historic districts. This study presents an interpretation model for historic districts made more comprehensive and effective with the addition of digital media components. Digital media, including websites, blogs, audio, video, social media and mobile apps, have changed the way we communicate on a daily basis. In order to reach as many audiences as possible, interpretation should include digital channels. Digital media interpretation methods allow for interpretation both on site (via mobile technology) and off site. Audiences also have the ability to participate in the interpretation process by contributing to an online dialog through social media. This thesis presents a case study on applying digital interpretation techniques to a recently nominated mid-20th-century historic district, Layne Crest, located in Muncie, Indiana. The case study utilizes a website with interpretive modules including narrative, video, images, infographics, and mapping.

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINITIONS

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Historic districts in the United States exist in two forms: a resource on the National Register of Historic Places (a list maintained by the National Park Service) or as a locally designated and regulated district. Despite having the same name, National Register historic districts and local historic districts are very different. Historic districts, first and foremost, are living places. In *Places that Count*, Thomas F. King develops a definition of “place” through an examination of various theoretical constructs – cultural, mnemonic, spiritual and scientific.³ Place is not easy to define. King states that “there are more to places than just the physical space they occupy. Places connect with human experience and human belief in many complicated ways. Places teach things; places embody moral lessons. Places are where we are grounded, they form and become parts of our identities, as individuals and as groups.”⁴ According to geographer Yi Fu Tuan place is more than simply space, and “space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”⁵ In the simplest form of this concept, historic districts are places because they have value by representing the significance of the past. Historic places are sources which reveal information both about the past and about present values. “The place is the vortex, the common ground, the center-point and the focus where divergent views about memory can be felt and expressed. The continued existence of the places permits the revision, reevaluation, and reinterpretation of memories over

³ Thomas F. King, *Places that Count: Traditional Cultural Properties in Cultural Resource Management*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2011), 81-98.

⁴ King, *Places that Count*, 93.

⁵ Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

time.”⁶ In contrast, the loss of place can be disorienting. Dolores Hayden, author of *The Power of Place* argues urban landscapes are repositories for social memory and that the natural and built environment “frames the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes. Decades of ‘urban renewal’ and ‘redevelopment’ of a savage kind have taught many communities that when the urban landscape is battered, important collective memories are obliterated.”⁷

Local Historic Districts vs. National Register Historic Districts

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a national non-profit preservation organization defines local historic districts as “areas in which historic buildings and their settings are protected by public review and encompass buildings deemed significant to the city’s cultural fabric.”⁸

According to the National Park Service, a National Register historic district “possesses a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of sites, buildings, structures or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.”⁹ In the case of the National Register of Historic Places, the significance of a place is based on a combination of “integrity” and on one or more of four criteria. These criteria are as follows:

“A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or

⁶ Thompson Mayes, “Why Old Places Matter: Memory.” *Preservation Leadership Forum* (blog), *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, December 4, 2013, <http://blog.preservationleadershipforum.org>.

⁷ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 9.

⁸ “What are Historic Districts?” *Preservation Leadership Forum*, accessed 01/19/2016, <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/saving-a-place/historic-districts/what-is-a-historic-district.html>

⁹ Patrick W. Andrus, “Historic Districts,” in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, ed. Rebecca H. Shrimpton, rev. ed. (1990, Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002) <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>.

C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.”¹⁰

This means that historic places can be included on the National Register of Historic Places if they represent history on a macro-level (trends, events, movements), or a micro-level (important people). Places that represent important design (either specific design, or types of design), or that can reveal information about the past through analysis (usually archaeology), are also eligible for nomination.

National Register districts are mostly honorary, providing some limited protection to properties through a review process for effects caused by federal undertakings. Local, state or private projects are therefore exempt from this review.¹¹ Local historic districts vary somewhat by state, due to State enabling legislation, but are specifically defined areas where any change to property within the district is regulated by local ordinance and overseen by a historic preservation commission. These local districts can regulate the actions of both public and private parties within the scope of the local ordinance. The local historic preservation ordinance might include regulations on demolitions, alterations, and/or new construction, depending on what power the state and local law gives the commission. For the purpose of this thesis “historic district” means any area of linked historic sites, buildings, structures or objects recognized on some level as a

¹⁰ Criteria for Evaluation, 36 CFR § 60.4

¹¹ Unless the local, state or private project has some federal funding, or requires a federally issued permit, under these circumstances the project is then considered a “federal undertaking.”

historic district. This definition includes National Register historic districts, local historic districts and historic districts that have both National Register and local designations.

Park vs. District

Historic districts are, however, distinct from historical parks such as Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, or Connor Prairie in Fishers, Indiana. Historical parks such as these include restored, moved, reconstructed, and new buildings, arranged to illustrate a historical concept or time period. Historical parks are curated collections of sites, buildings, structures and objects contained within an open-air museum setting. Historical parks are not historic districts.

Law and Historic Districts

The flagship of historic preservation legislation in the United States is the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act which sets up federal funding and support for historic preservation. In the preamble to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) members of Congress laid out the goals and reasons for the act which speak directly to the public importance of historic preservation. The second part of the act's preamble states that "the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people."¹² This introduces the concept that historic places are not just places set aside as memorials, but rather they represent the intersection of past, present and future and should continue to be part of community life. The fourth part of the preamble states that "the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans."¹³ Preservation is important because these physical representations of heritage and culture from the past provide a both tangible and

¹² National Historic Preservation Act, Section 1, Pub. L. No. 89-665, as amended by Pub. L. No. 96-515."

¹³ Ibid.

intangible resources in the present. Incorporating historic places into daily life as “a living part of our community” fosters a deeper understanding of the diverse cultural legacy of our nation and supports continued cultural development.

Communicating the value of historic places begins with education. NHPA states that one of the reasons historic preservation is in the public interest is due to the educational value of historic places.¹⁴ NHPA gives states an opportunity, through funding, to develop a state historic preservation office (SHPO) which would assume responsibility, among other things, to “provide public information, education and training and technical assistance in historic preservation.”¹⁵ NHPA, in turn, encourages SHPOs to share this responsibility with local preservation commissions.¹⁶ Over the intervening decades since NHPA was enacted, the definitions of what makes a place “historic” have changed and evolved, as have the questions we ask of history and the concepts of what we can learn from historic places. Despite these changes, educating the public is central to the appreciation and continued support for historic places.¹⁷ The communication of value and educating the public about historic places and historic preservation are encompassed by the concept of interpretation.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is a way of communicating information to facilitate learning by making connections between people and resources. In 1957, prior to the National Historic Preservation Act, Freeman Tilden wrote *Interpreting Our Heritage*, a manual for communicating about heritage resources to the public. Tilden defines interpretation as “an educational activity which aims to

¹⁴ National Historic Preservation Act, 1966, Section 1

¹⁵ National Historic Preservation Act, 1966, § 302303

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ron Thomson and Marilyn Harper, *National Register Bulletin 9; Telling the Stories: Planning Effective Interpretive Programs for Properties Listed in the National Register of Historic Places*. (Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2000), 9, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/interp/>.

reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experiences, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”¹⁸ Professionals and volunteers in many organizations - from local historical societies and state history organizations to the National Park Service - have built upon Tilden’s concept to develop the field of heritage interpretation in the United States. This thesis will use the definition of interpretation of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). The NAI defines interpretation as “a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.”¹⁹

Communication and Interpretation

As Tilden and the NAI state, interpretation is more than facts. At its core, interpretation is communication. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines communication as “the act or process of using words, sounds, signs or behavior to express or exchange information.”²⁰ The successful exchange of information is affected by audience, content, and delivery: the interpreter needs to know who they are communicating with (audience), what they are trying to communicate (content) and how the communication will take place (delivery). All three elements influence the reach and results of interpretation.

Audience is central to interpretation because both the content and the delivery depend on who receives the information. Interpreting historic districts addresses the community as a whole, rather than for narrowly defined demographic groups identified through market research. Interpretation for community audiences needs to be broadly inclusive, addressing diverse while

¹⁸ Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage*, 33.

¹⁹ “Mission, Vision and Core Values.” National Association for Interpretation. February 24, 2016. www.interpnet.com/NAI/interp/About/About_NAI/What_We_Believe/nai/_About/Mission_Vision_and_Core_Values.aspx.

²⁰ *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. “communication,” accessed March 1, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>.

focusing on shared heritage and values of a place. According to research by Lesley Curthoys, Brent Cuthbertson and Julie Clark, from Lakehead University in Ontario, interpretation about shared values addresses needs within the community to connect lifestyle with place.²¹ They argue that community based interpretation “addresses these needs by encouraging intergenerational engagement with local landscapes through community mapping, murals, festivals, community-based art, music, walking tours, story sharing, etc. In summary, interpretation for and by community members offers social spaces for neighbors to collectively experience home-place more deeply.”²²

The content for interpreting historic districts lies in the history and significance of the place. The National Park Service states that “the information in the National Register nominations can and should be used in long-term, continuing programs to make the general public aware of the value of the historic places in their communities.” The history and significance sections of National Register nominations are an excellent beginning point for gathering interpretive content for districts on the National Register of Historic Places. Some National Register nominations have extensive history and significance sections while others, often earlier nominations, have short statements of significance with narrow focus and fairly limited historical information. In either case, the National Register information can and should serve as a starting point which is then filled in by further information, specifically information relevant to the audience. This can be done in a variety of ways, but before information relevant to an audience or audiences is added, the audiences need to be identified.

²¹ Lesley P. Curthoys, Brent Cuthbertson, and Julie Clark, “Connecting to Home-place through Community Focused Heritage Interpretive Planning.” *Journal of Interpretation Research* 12, no. 2 (2007): 64, http://www.interpnet.com/NAI/interp/Resources/Publications/Journal_of_Interpretation_Research/Archive/nai/_publications/JIR_Archive.aspx

²² Curthoys, Cuthbertson, and Clark, “Connecting to Home-place,” 65.

Delivery, the third aspect of communication, should be considered in conjunction with audiences and content. Some audiences will be reached by specific delivery, other audiences by specific content. Occasionally new or unidentified audiences are attracted by specific combination of delivery and content. An example of this phenomenon is the Instagram account of Raina Regan, @raiosunshine.²³ Certain audiences are attracted to the account because of the production quality of the photographs (content), others because @raiosunshine is a featured user on Instagram (delivery). Other audiences follow the account because of the historic preservation focus (content), or the vintage and historic buildings that are the subjects of many of the photos (content), or are connected to the photos through a hashtag (delivery). However some new audiences have begun following @raiosunshine because Regan takes beautiful photographs of historic places and shares a little bit of their story through captions and well-crafted hashtags (fusion of content and delivery).

Goal of Interpretation

The National Association for Interpretation begin their definition of interpretation with “a mission based communication process.”²⁴ The “mission” of interpreting historic districts is to build widespread appreciation for historic districts with the aim of protecting historic districts because they are important cultural resources. In *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, Knudson, Cable and Beck argue that interpretation is a way to build local support for historic preservation and “protect public and private investment in the resource.”²⁵ They go on to claim that interpretation adds value to resources by helping people to “enjoy it more, learn more about it and make it part of their own lives.”²⁶ Historic places are enjoyed through the understanding of

²³ Regan, Raina (@raiosunshine). <https://www.instagram.com/raiosunshine/>

²⁴ NAI. “Mission, Vision and Core Values.”

²⁵ Douglas M. Knudson, Ted T. Cable and Larry Beck, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 1999), 55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

their significance and Tilden maintained that “from that fuller understanding follows a sense of personal custody.”²⁷

CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETATION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Interpretation is often done in museums and at individual historic sites. Broader forms of interpretation can be found in State or National Parks and cultural trails. In 2000, the National Park Service issued a National Register Bulletin, a technical publication with recommended practices, entitled “Telling the Stories: Planning Effective Interpretive Programs for Properties Listed in the National Register of Historic Places,” which presents general guidelines for interpreting a various historic sites using different methods or processes, each illustrated by case studies.²⁸ Many of the case studies presented in “Telling the Stories” are parks or museums.

Although some interpretation does happen in historic districts, very little has been written specifically on the types of interpretation and processes of interpreting historic districts. Making generalizations about historic districts is difficult to do without doing injustice to the variety of historic districts because they are all very different from one another, varying greatly in size, number of resources, and types of resources (residential, commercial, industrial, rural, etc.). However, historic districts frequently share similar challenges and opportunities because they are frequently the landscapes of daily life, and deal with the intersection of public and private spaces including roads, paths, sidewalks, businesses and residences. Historic districts often have multiple categories of significance and broad periods of significance which can pose organizational and operational challenges for interpretation. At the same time, depth and breadth of significance presents an opportunity to tell a greater variety of stories that contribute to the sense of continuity

²⁷ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 190

²⁸ Thomson and Harper, *National Register Bulletin; Telling the Stories*.

and put the changes over time into a broader historical perspective. These aspects of historic districts mean that they require a different approach than parks or museums.

EXAMPLES OF CURRENT PRACTICES FOR INTERPRETING HISTORIC RESOURCES

In the National Register Bulletin “Telling the Stories,” the authors use case studies of successful interpretive programming to illustrate forms of interpretation. The authors divide interpretation into two broad categories “interpretation presented by people [and] interpretation not presented by people”²⁹ which can be categorized as personal and media interpretation. Each category encompasses many methods of interpretation (see figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Interpretation Types

Means of Interpretation	Method of Interpretation
Personal Interpretation (interpretation presented directly by people)	Tours, field trips/field studies, discussions, lectures, events, festivals, demonstrations, workshops, seminars, performances, reenactments, etc.
Media Interpretation (interpretation not presented directly by people)	Brochures, magazines, websites, books, blogs, maps, classroom curriculum, exhibits, signs, artwork, movies, audio tours, virtual tours, social media, mobile apps, etc.

These case studies look at examples of historic districts that do a good job of utilizing a form of interpretation for telling the stories about the place.

Personal Interpretation

Personal interpretation methods involve direct interaction between the interpreters and audiences. Below are some examples of successful interpretation programs for historic districts that utilize personal interpretation methods.

²⁹ Thomson and Harper, *National Register Bulletin; Telling the Stories*, 3.

Guided Tours

Tours are strongly associated with historical interpretation, from house museum tours to walking tours, the concept of a guide leading a group of people to points of interest and providing an interpretive perspective is typical. Tours of historic districts are as varied as the historic districts they interpret, and are as good, or as bad, as the interpreter that presents them. Examples of interpretive tours abound.

The National Park Service “Telling the Stories” bulletin highlights “Buffalo Tours” interpretive tours of history, architecture and place in Buffalo, New York. Buffalo Tours are held by Preservation Buffalo Niagara (PBN).³⁰ The tours include regularly scheduled weekly tours downtown March through November and specialized tours scheduled throughout the year, with more tours during the summer tourist season. PBN utilizes their website, e-newsletter and an account on social networking site Facebook to announce upcoming tours.

Field trips or field studies

Connecting interpretation and classroom learning is an important part of the field trip experience. Collaborating with local schools to create content that intersects with curriculum has become increasingly important with the mandates on testing and strictly defined learning objectives. Historic Philadelphia has worked with educators to develop several interpretive programs that introduce historical concepts to students in downtown Philadelphia.³¹ The “Once Upon a Nation Story Stroll” is a walking tour designed for students in 3rd-12th grade with a tour that spans three city blocks and which claims “students become part of the stories in the very places

³⁰ “Buffalo Tours,” Preservation Buffalo Niagara [website], accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.preservationbuffaloniagara.org/buffalo-tours/>.

³¹ “Field Trips,” Historic Philadelphia [website], accessed March 2, 2016, <http://historicphiladelphia.org/historic-philadelphia-group-information/field-trips-philadelphia/>.

they happened.”³² The program has been designed to specifically address the standards of the National Council for the Social Studies and Common Core with topics such as “Time, Continuity and Change,” “Civic Ideas and Practices,” and “Speaking and Listening Skills.”

Events

Events are an excellent way to raise awareness and reach audiences that might not otherwise seek out historic interpretation. Examples of events are as numerous as the places that host them and can be as simple as a picnic or as extravagant as a festival. An example of a festival event connecting a historic district and local history to a wide range of audiences is the Elkhart Jazz Festival.³³ Held in the downtown historic district of Elkhart, Indiana, the Elkhart Jazz Festival draws audiences from across the nation and is an Indiana Bicentennial Legacy Project, recognized by the state as a celebration of Indiana’s past and present.³⁴ Along with the past, present, and future of Jazz, the Elkhart Jazz festival celebrates the local history of Elkhart as a brass industry city, the headquarters of Conn-Selmer instruments, and a site with a long history of brass and instrument manufacturing.

Workshops, demonstrations and seminars

Personal interpretation with a focus on audience participation empower people to become directly involved with local history and historic preservation efforts. Workshops, demonstrations and seminars are ways provide applicable training to audiences interested in direct forms of participation. Restore Michiana is an annual series of lectures and hands-on workshops held in St. Joseph County, Indiana by the Historic Preservation Commission of South Bend and St. Joseph

³² Historic Philadelphia Inc. *Student Trip Planner*. (Philadelphia, PA: Historic Philadelphia, 2015), accessed February 21, 2016, <http://historicphiladelphia.org/historic-philadelphia-group-information/field-trips-philadelphia/>.

³³ “Elkhart Jazz Festival,” accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.elkhartjazzfestival.com/#fun2016>.

³⁴ “Elkhart Jazz Festival,” accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.elkhartjazzfestival.com/about/>; and “Indiana Bicentennial Celebration 2016: Bicentennial Legacy Projects,” State of Indiana, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.in.gov/ibc/2351.htm>.

County.³⁵ The workshops center on a theme and are held in various local historic places and connect audiences interested in preservation, crafts and local history together with

Media Interpretation

Media interpretation encompasses a wide variety of interpretive methods, from public art to print, to various digital platforms. Below are some examples of successful interpretative programs for historic districts that utilize media in the method of interpretation.

Publications

The most typical historic district publication is the walking tour brochure. Like the guided tour, walking tour brochures of historic districts are as varied as the historic districts they interpret, and are also as good, or as bad, as the design and function of the brochure. Examples of walking tour brochures for historic districts are numerous. The downtown historic district of Marshall, Michigan, has a series of walking tours with a self-guided walking tour. The brochure developed by the Historic Marshall organization is printed in color coded sections which correspond to colored dots painted on the sidewalk which make the self-guided tours easy to navigate.³⁶

An organization does not need to be large and well-funded to produce quality publications that tell local historic preservation stories. The non-profit organization ARCH, in Fort Wayne, Indiana publishes an excellent magazine a couple times per year.³⁷ The ARCH magazine has easy to read, well designed pages, with stories about local historic preservation projects, and information on local history. ARCH also publishes the magazine digitally on their website.

³⁵ “Restore Michiana,” Historic Preservation Commission SBSJC, accessed March 12, 2016. <http://www.restoremichiana.com/home.html>.

³⁶ “Historic Marshall Michigan,” Historic Marshall, accessed March 12, 2016. <http://historicmarshall.org/>.

³⁷ “Resources,” ARCH Inc. <http://archfw.org/services/digital-books-and-magazines/>.

Movies and Audio-visual materials

Movies and other audio-visual materials have been used in interpretation for many years. Traditional forms of audio visual materials include movies shown at national parks, state parks and historic sites which are used regularly and have become a recognized or even expected form of interpretation. Creating and using audio-visual materials has become increasingly easy over the last decade with the development of digital cameras and digital audio recorders. Even more recently, mobile smart phones often have digital video and audio capture features built into the operating system, or can be added through apps. Digital video and audio make the creation of audio-visual material less expensive and relatively easy to accomplish. Historic Madison has a “virtual tour,” which is a video showing places throughout the downtown historic district of Madison, Indiana. This video is available to audiences on the Historic Madison website using the popular digital video hosting and sharing service “YouTube”.

Websites and Social Media

Today, many organizations use websites, social media and other internet resources, usually to communicate general information and to connect with audiences and stakeholders.³⁸ The Heritage Hill Historic District in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has an excellent neighborhood website that provides visitors and residents information about the district, events, tours, programs, and houses for sale and rent.³⁹ Many historic districts and historic preservation commissions use social media platforms, for example, the Muncie Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation Commission of Muncie Indiana, the Historic Preservation Commission of Lexington Missouri, and Berwyn

³⁸ Marcia W. DiStaso, Tina McCorkindale and Donald K. Wright, “How Public Relations Executives Perceive and Measure the Impact of Social Media in Their Organizations.” *Public Relations Review* 37, (2011). 325-328. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811111000750>.

³⁹ Heritage Hill Neighborhood Group, “Welcome to Heritage Hill,” Heritage Hill Historic District, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.heritagehillweb.org/>.

Historic Preservation Commission of Berwyn, Illinois, all have accounts on Facebook.⁴⁰ Beyond their capacity for providing general information, websites also have powerful interpretive possibility. From *savingplaces.org* the website of the National Trust for Historic Preservation which highlights stories of preservation efforts around the country, to *historicmuncie.org* a website that shares neighborhood histories, historic photographs, and documentaries and about historic districts in Muncie, Indiana, websites can share the stories of historic districts to audiences around the world.⁴¹

Spatial information

Spaces and the relationship between spaces are an important part of the stories historic districts have to tell Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) in connection with location-aware software provide a range of methods for interpreting historic districts. Two of the tools currently available to develop interpretation for historic districts are Story Maps and Curatescape. While the tools that can be used to create GIS or location-aware content change, the concept of interpreting historic districts with spatial information has many interpretive possibilities.

Story Maps – Story Maps is an open source software developed by ESRI, the company that owns, manages and develops ArcGIS.⁴² Story Maps can be made about any subject, utilizing the capabilities of the GIS maps to express concepts, illustrate points, and demonstrate spatial context. An excellent example of the interpretive power of the Story Maps platform is *Mapping*

⁴⁰ Muncie Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation Commission of Muncie Indiana, <https://www.facebook.com/mhprc/>; Historic Preservation Commission of Lexington Missouri, <https://www.facebook.com/LexHPC/>; and Historic Preservation Commission of Berwyn, Illinois, <https://www.facebook.com/BerwynHistoricPreservationCommission/>; all accessed March 25, 2016.

⁴¹ “Saving Places,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed March 25, 2016 <https://savingplaces.org/>; and “Historic Muncie: Preserving Middletown’s Neighborhoods,” accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.historicmuncie.org/>.

⁴² “Story Maps,” ESRI, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/>.

Segregation in Washington DC.⁴³ The Story Map shows places in Washington DC that had racial segregation by deed restriction in one color and places that petitioned to add segregation to blocks of residences in another color, each area has information on the when the segregation was put in place. Along the side there is a narrative describing the court cases, media attention and local public sentiment that attended these policies. This project was produced by Prologue DC, an organization of historians located in Washington DC that, among other things, develop interpretation for sites in and around the nation's capital.

Curatescape– Curatescape is a proprietary software developed by the Center for Public History + Digital Humanities at Cleveland State University.⁴⁴ The software uses location-aware software to connect information to specific locations. This allows the program to alert a person using the software on a mobile device when they are near a location which has information connected to it. The first example of this project is Cleveland Historical, also developed by Center for Public History + Digital Humanities. Cleveland Historical has stories and digitized archival materials plotted onto a map. The project is accessible to the general public on a website or through a mobile app.⁴⁵ The app has a function that will send an alert to users when the mobile device with the app reaches the location that corresponds to one of the stories. This allows users to connect to stories about a place while standing at the physical location.

CURRENT PROBLEM FOR INTERPRETING HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Each of the examples above present one aspect of how various methods of interpretation can be used for a historic district. However, these examples are frequently the only means of

⁴³ "Mapping Segregation in Washington DC," *Story Map*, Prologue DC, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://jmt.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=061d0da22587475fb969483653179091>

⁴⁴ Mark Tebeau, "About Curatescape," Curatescape, March 23, 2016, <http://curatescape.org/about/>.

⁴⁵ "Cleveland Historical," Center for Public History + Digital Humanities, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://clevelandhistorical.org/>.

interpretation for the historic district. A single method of interpretation is incomplete, and herein lies the problem.

Incomplete Interpretation

Incomplete interpretation is any form or forms of interpretation that address a small audience. Using one or two methods of interpretation, however excellent the interpretive materials might be, will not reach every audience. Using several methods of interpretation in conjunction provides more opportunities for people to encounter or discover the interpretation and also creates more channels for people to access the interpretive materials.

CHAPTER THREE

MODEL FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT INTERPRETATION

COMPREHENSIVE INTERPRETATION

In contrast to incomplete interpretation, comprehensive interpretation uses multiple interpretive methods in order to maximize the number of people and expand the types of audiences reached. The goal of the comprehensive interpretation model is to reach the greatest number of people with interpretive content so that they will understand, appreciate and ultimately protect historic districts.

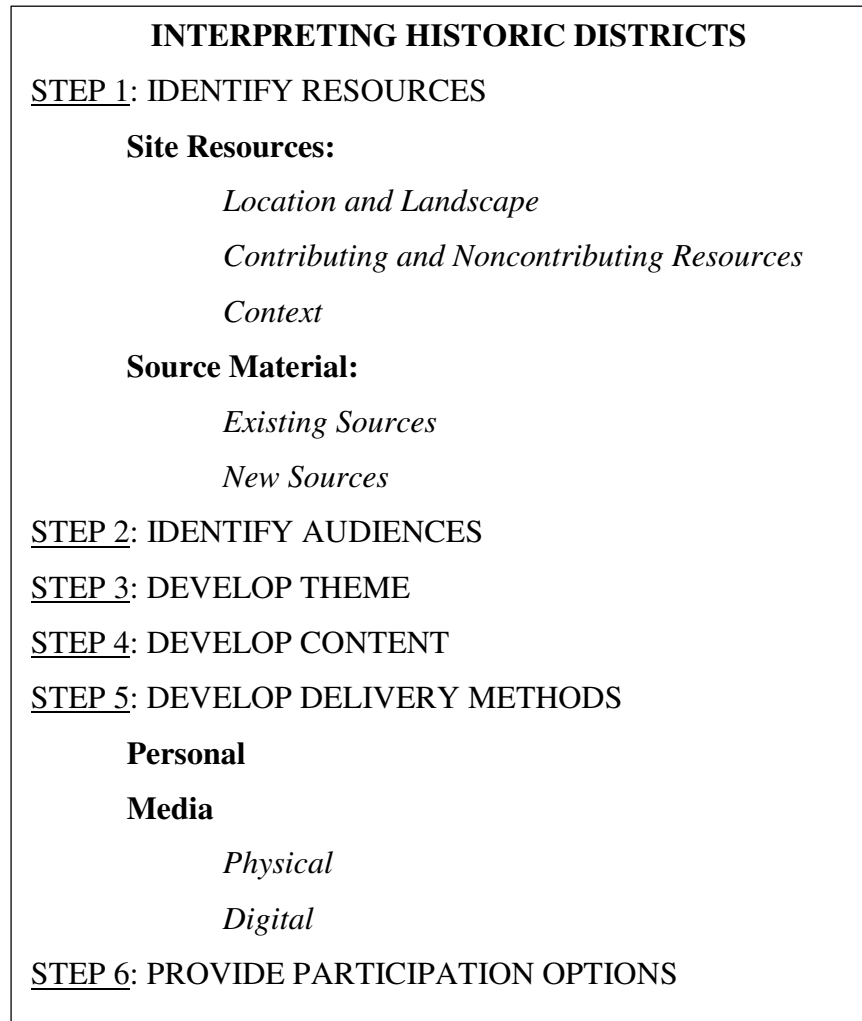
In *The Power of Place* Dolores Hayden discusses the importance of a collaborative, comprehensive approach to interpreting historic places. Hayden recommends that historians, preservationists, environmentalists, and artists can all provide sources that “contribute to the presence of the past in the city.”⁴⁶ Interpretation needs to be place-based, to take into account the unique features of the historic district in ways specific to the site. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, this model presents a framework for applying interpretive best-practices and innovations to the specific challenges and opportunities of historic districts.

THE MODEL

This model is derived from recommendations for interpretation in four sources: The National Association for Interpretation Standards and Best Practices, Knudson, Cable and Beck’s comprehensive volume *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*; John A. Veverka’s concise and practical *Interpretive Master Planning*; and a study by Skibins, Powell, and Stern entitled “Exploring empirical support for interpretation’s best practices.” Together these sources provide a foundation for this interpretive model.

⁴⁶ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 45.

Figure 3.1: Comprehensive Interpretation Model



STEP 1: IDENTIFY RESOURCES

The first step in developing any interpretation is knowing what there is to interpret. This includes both the resources on site within the district and informational resources located elsewhere. A clear idea of what physical resources exist within the district as well as what information and other materials exist and are available to be applied to the interpretation of the district is important for successful planning. While “resources” in the context of the National Register of Historic Places means sites, buildings, structures and objects, “resources” in the context of interpretation is a broader concept that encompasses these tangible resources but also includes

intangible resources such as tradition and culture. In a study of interpretation best practices, Skibins, Powell and Stern, found that “resource and place-based messaging” which they defined as “interpretive message focused on relationship between visitor and site/resource” was the most commonly used successful practice.⁴⁷ In other words, the interpretation aimed to show connections between the place, the visitor, and the unique qualities of the place rather than telling a generic story that used the place as an illustration.

Site

Typically, historic districts have an inventory of resources. National Register historic districts are required to include an inventory of resources, a history of the district and present a case for the significance of the district as part of the nomination process. Copies of these nomination forms are available through the National Park Service and can serve as a foundation for identifying resources on site. Local historic district requirements vary from state to state, but local historic districts also require a designation process and the public records from this process can also be used to inform the identification of resources on site.

Location and Landscape

The landscape is a very important feature of a historic district. Historic districts need to be viewed holistically the buildings, structures, and objects of a historic district relate to each other and their environment as a kind of landscape. The location of buildings within each lot, road features, sidewalks (or lack thereof), trees, streetlights, etc. contribute to the story of the district as a whole, whether these features are considered as contributing to the period of significance.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey C. Skibins, Robert B. Powell and Mark J. Stern, “Exploring empirical support for interpretation’s best practices,” *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 17 no. 1 (2012): 30, http://www.interpnet.com/NAI/interp/Resources/Publications/Journal_of_Interpretation_Research/Archive/nai_publications/JIR_Archive.aspx.

Contributing and Noncontributing Resources

The paradigm of the National Register of Historic Places involves assigning a period, or (occasionally) more than one period, of significance to historic districts. Typically this period encompasses a very small span of time that represents important developments or events in, or associated with, the district. In other words the “golden era” or “heyday” of the district. While important for categorization of districts and other resources, the period of significance often undermines a holistic view of a historic district by dividing individual sites, buildings, structures and objects into the categories of “contributing” and “noncontributing.” Noncontributing resources are those that are from a period other than the period of significance, or are places that have lost integrity. Just because a resource is defined as noncontributing doesn’t mean that it has no part to play in the district. Noncontributing resources fill in the gaps between the period of significance and the present day and play a role in the understanding of context.

Context

“Context” has a number of meanings in relation to historic districts. The first meaning derives from the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for preservation planning which defines context as “the relationship of individual properties to other similar properties... Information about historic properties representing aspects of history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture [that is] collected and organized to define these relationships.”⁴⁸ Typically context within this definition typically refers to properties by type and is very broad, taking national, state and regional factors into consideration. Context also has the meaning of orientation within a historical period. This meaning of context places the district’s period of significance into perspective of

⁴⁸ Secretary of the Interior, “Standards for Preservation Planning: Standard I. Preservation Planning Establishes Historic Contexts” in *Archaeology and Historic Preservation: Standards and Guidelines [as amended and annotated]*. (Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1983), https://www.nps.gov/history/local-law/arch_stnds_1.htm.

events, trends and viewpoints characteristic of the surrounding era. The third meaning of context has to do with relationship of resources to their physical surroundings, both within the district and the district's position to the surrounding city and/or region. The context of physical location is particularly important to interpret when elements of that context are no longer extant. For example, relationship of workers' housing to a factory is not clear when the factory has been demolished.

All three meanings of context are important elements in interpreting a historic district. Interpretation is about making connections. Placing a historic district in context with other like places, within its historical era, and in orientation to the physical surroundings are ways of revealing the complex connections of place and the forces that shaped that place.

Sources

Source materials are important to interpreting historic districts in two ways. First, source materials provide the underlying facts and information that the interpretation is based on. Second, source materials provide the stories that interpretation can use to connect facts and information to peoples' experiences.

Find existing sources

Sources that have already been produced, compiled and/or processed are "existing" sources. Useful and available sources are place specific and will be effected by multiple factors. Sources include books, public records, maps, atlases, city directories, organization/club/religious records, diaries, correspondence, photographs, and artifacts. In an article for *Archival Issues*, Linda Barnickel argues for the essential and vital role that archival research plays in the interpretation of historic sites, keeping interpretation authentic and factual by tying the interpretation to data and primary sources.⁴⁹ While methods for gathering these sources have changed with digital

⁴⁹ Linda Barnickel, "A Firm Foundation: Archival Research and Interpretation at Historic Sites," *Archival Issues* 27 no. 1 (2002): 9-21.

collections and 24/7 online access to digital repositories, “existing” sources are those sources that have already been produced, compiled and/or processed. These sources are typically available through city, state and federal offices, historical societies, museums, archives and personal collections. The availability of these sources depends on a number of factors. The age of the historic district affects the amount of public records that are available, as well as information such as Sanborn fire insurance maps or city directories. The socio-economic status of the inhabitants of the historic district has an effect on the availability of items such as photographs and artifacts – often lower and working class neighborhoods have fewer artifacts because the everyday items used by the people who lived there were not considered worth saving at historical societies and museums

Develop Potential sources

Sources that have yet to be taken advantage of are “Potential” sources. These include newer technologically driven sources such as GIS, but potential sources also include archaeological excavations and oral histories. Both of these sources of information have long been utilized by historians, although some of the methods for gathering and analyzing these potential sources have altered with technological changes. Developing potential sources is an important part of including diverse perspectives and increasing participation in sharing of stories about place. Hayden highlights the importance of shared authority between professional preservationists or historians with the local community in deciding what should be preserved and why. Interpreting the history that matters to local people encourages participation, a process Hayden describes as supporting social memory and embracing “the stories citizens think need to be told.”⁵⁰ Oral histories are an important source that often needs to be developed. Many neighborhoods and groups with strong

⁵⁰ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 62.

oral history traditions have not shared these histories with the public. Providing an opportunity for people to share oral histories and personal memories is a way to allow local people to own the interpretation process. Spatial information is another area where new sources can be developed. Maps and photographs have long been used in history and historical interpretation as a means of connecting the spatial elements of history to the narrative and they are useful ways of examining the history hidden in plain sight in landscapes, neighborhoods and buildings. Developing potential sources of spatial information provide more than wayfinding by connecting abstract data to place-based information which can reveal new information. Mapping presents information in a way that allows the viewer to visualize connections in relationships of location, effect, and causation. Maps are especially useful for historic districts because they are well suited to spatial information.

Figure 3.2: Source Types

SOURCES	Narrative	Visual/Spatial	Data
Existing	newspapers, magazines, court records, diaries, journals, correspondence, organization/club/religious records	maps, Sanborn fire insurance maps, atlases, photos, aerial photos, architectural drawings, site plans, engravings, artifacts	population censuses, agriculture censuses, deeds, tax lists, business accounts, household accounts, artifacts
Potential	Oral histories, comments or contributions to social media	Photogrammetry, digital photography, archaeology, GIS	Archaeology, surveys

STEP 2: IDENTIFY AUDIENCES

Understanding audience includes understanding and remaining sensitive to demographics, socio-economic factors and language use. Recognizing these features is important to effectively reaching multiple audiences.

At the most basic level, audiences for any historic district belong to one of three categories: residents, locals and visitors. Residents are the people who live in the neighborhood, locals are

people who live in the same city or vicinity but not in the historic district, and visitors are people who do not live in the city or its immediate vicinity. Residents and visitors are the usual audiences for historic districts – those who live in a place, and those who are interested in seeing the place.⁵¹ Local people who do not live in the historic district are often an unreached audience. The local audience is important because these people effect the historic district and its surroundings because they pay local taxes, vote in local elections, serve on committees, and run for local offices. These are the people who have a say in how local funds are allocated and local people either confirm or deny the reputations gained by areas of the city. Locals and residents are the most important audiences for developing a sustainable interpretive program. Without developing community support, interpreting historic districts will not be successful in raising awareness about historic preservation or in protecting historic districts. However, developing local support makes interpretation a powerful tool for connecting people to places. In *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities*, Andrew Hurley makes the case that “through history, then, urban inhabitants lay claim to space. Conceptualizing urban landscape as an inheritance confers on its heirs an entitlement to control its destiny. Indeed, involving communities at the grassroots in the historical interpretation of their neighborhood is empowering because the very act involves them in the production of that space.”⁵²

⁵¹ Melanie K. Smith, *Issues in Cultrual Resource Tourism Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 143.

⁵² Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 53.

STEP 3: DEVELOP THEME

The theme should be the foundational element or central idea in every interpretive element.

The National Association for Interpretation has published a series on interpretation best practices.

The best practices regarding interpretive theming are as follows:

- The site has an identifiable central idea or theme that ties the content of various interpretive methods together in a coherent way.
- Each program or product has a theme related to the site's central theme.
- Themes are stated in a single sentence.
- Thematic interpretive methods are part of a larger interpretive plan aligned with organizational objectives.
- A site's central theme expresses what it is about the topic that supports the site significance, what is relevant to the audience and what management hopes to convey to the audience.¹

A clear, concise theme anchors interpretation, and clearly related sub-themes provide a framework for various content and delivery methods. In other words, the theme needs to be the organizing principle of interpretation. This does not mean superimposing an open ended concept like "Victorian era" or "World War Two" on to a site. The theme needs to be specific to the place and its resources. In the case of historic districts, the theme should be based on the district's significance.

Developing a theme that is broadly defined but easily verbalized, provides a standard to which all the elements of multiplatform, diverse interpretive elements, can be held. This provides a sense of structure while presenting stories from various perspectives and through multiple channels. Using theme as a structure to build upon, many interpretive elements can contribute a diverse and multi-faceted story.

STEP 3: DEVELOP CONTENT

Content is the heart of interpretation. Content connects abstract to concrete and past to present. Freeman Tilden said that "interpretation is the revelation of the larger truth that lies behind

any statement of fact.”⁵³ Narratives and visual content build upon the foundation of the resources in order to connect people to the information. Skibins, Powell and Stern identify these connections in their evaluation of interpretive best practices as “a link between tangible and intangible concepts and objects and demonstrated the relationship to universal concepts.”⁵⁴

STEP 5: DEVELOP DELIVERY METHOD

Delivery is the way in which content is brought to audiences. Therefore, delivery is intrinsically tied to both the audience and to the content. Delivery methods are important to reaching target audiences. Audiences will have different responses to delivery methods. Choosing delivery methods should also respond to content because specific delivery forms are more suited to types of content. Content takes many forms depending on the source of the information: written, aural, visual and combinations of all three. Knudson, Cable and Beck state that “finding the best outlet for the story helps maximize its impact.”⁵⁵

Using more than one delivery method is important for reaching the greatest number of audiences. Delivery types appeal to audiences for different reasons.

Personal

Personal interpretation is generally regarded as the most effective form of interpretation.⁵⁶ While the typical form of personal interpretation is the guided tour, there are many other forms of interpretation that fall into this category. Events,

⁵³ Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage*, 33.

⁵⁴ Skibins, Powell and Stern, “Empirical Support for Interpretation’s Best Practices,” 30.

⁵⁵ Knudson, Cable, and Beck, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, 192.

⁵⁶ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 134; Knudson, Cable and Beck *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, 152.

Media

Media interpretation involves at least one medium other than personal interaction. Delivery methods vary widely and include mass media (such as radio, television, etc.), physical media (signs, books, etc.), and online media (websites, social media, etc.). Today, lines between these media types is blurred with television streaming online, social media influencing mass media broadcasting, and publications such as blogs and e-books functioning in similarly to newspapers and books. The way people reach information has changed dramatically and continues to change rapidly. While this can be daunting, it also provides more opportunities to reach audiences with information and engage audience participation.

STEP 6: PROVIDE PARTICIPATION OPTIONS

Both Personal and Media interpretation provide options for participation. Just as interpreters should adjust delivery for content and audience, so participation methods should also be adjusted to fit delivery and the target audiences. Providing multiple avenues of participation gives people more opportunities to find a means of participation suitable to their needs. Social media have become increasingly important avenues of communication for all kinds of organizations. In a study of 188 non-profit organizations use of social media, Chao Guo and Gregory Saxton found that 93% used social media platforms in some way, and that 80% were active on the social media service Twitter.⁵⁷ In their sample of 750 Twitter messages and found that the organizations used these messages to communicate with stake holders by providing information and building or deepening community connections.

⁵⁷ Chao Guo and Gregory Saxton, "Tweeting Social Change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43 no.1 (2012): 57-79, doi: 10.1177/0899764012471585.

COMBINING TECHNIQUES FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERPRETATION

“While a single, preserved historic place may trigger potent memories, networks of such places begin to reconnect social memory on an urban scale. Networks of related places organized in a thematic way, exploit the potential of reaching urban audiences more fully with more complex histories.”⁵⁸ The concept of comprehensive historic district interpretation is one of unity in diversity. This can be achieved by using a collaborative approach to interpretation, inviting residents and community members to determine the direction that interpretation takes. Many voices, many perspectives, contributing to an overarching story about a place. There are a number of challenges in any collaborative enterprise, not the least of which is encouraging community engagement. In the case of telling a diverse and unified story, there are two immediate challenges. First, that unity does not quash diversity. Consistency could be achieved by telling stories from a unified perspective. History is never simple, and providing stories about the past from only one perspective does injustice to the complex and often “messy” truth. The second challenge is that diversity does not drown out unity. A goal of presenting many perspectives could be achieved by dismissing any common theme and simply including everything. Including everything without the foundational structure could be confusing and cause people to have difficulty making connections between information. Consistency doesn’t mean that everyone has to agree. Comprehensive interpretation with a thematic structure provides a means to present dissenting opinions and conflicting views in a way that allows people to examine complexity without becoming overwhelmed or confused. History is not unilateral, a “one-dimensional approach negates the historical significance of the time, place, events, ideologies, or people associated with historic commercial buildings and districts, and prevents the discovery of a valuable historic narrative that

⁵⁸ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 78.

can be utilized in the economic development and preservation efforts of the buildings and districts.”¹ Telling a story that is diverse, authentic, and multi-faceted is a careful balance of allowing all voices to be heard while connecting every perspective back to a unifying theme in a way that is clear and understandable to audiences.

In *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, Knudson, Cable and Beck describe a similar method which they label “total programming.” The choice of “comprehensive interpretation” over “total programming” was deliberate. First, total programming is an approach that is structured in a “top down” or hierarchical way, which is known as vertical organization. This means that a small group of “experts” choose what should be interpreted (and what should not be interpreted) and then implement the interpretation with minimal outside contribution. Knudson, Cable and Beck’s “total programming” approach is more suited to parks where one organization owns, develops, and manages all the resources. The “comprehensive interpretation” model proposed here is designed to be participatory and collaborative. This means that multiple, diverse, stakeholders, such as residents and community members, are consulted and involved in the interpretation process. This structure, known as horizontal organization, gives the responsibility for determining what should, and should not, be interpreted to the stakeholders. This does not mean that there can be no expert input, but rather than experts, residents, community members and other stakeholders contribute to interpretation development. This collaborative approach also means that developing interpretation is an ongoing process of input and implementation. Second, “comprehensive” has the connotation of broad knowledge base which is a goal for the model. Collaboration between stakeholders with multiple perspectives provides a broad knowledge base. Using horizontal organization as the structure for the model for sharing and preserving community stories about place is ideal for reaching multiple audiences.

The “multifaceted approach to historic district interpretation” described by Stephanie Aylworth in her article in the *APT Bulletin* is an approach toward the study of historic sites and the types of information gathered about places. Aylworth suggests an approach to gathering information about historic sites that is oriented by an understanding of the purpose and function of individual sites within the context of a whole district. The focus of this approach is information gathering, rather than information dissemination. Applying philosophical, sociological and historical methods to researching historic districts is an important foundation to sharing authentic and accurate information with the public. The comprehensive interpretation model builds on this foundation and connects this mode of researching historic districts with a participatory aspect that gives residents and community members ownership in the interpretive process.

Using multiple interpretive techniques: Greenbelt, Maryland

Greenbelt, Maryland, is one of three “green belt” towns, planned communities (with Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale Wisconsin being the other two) from the New Deal era. In connection with the Greenbelt Museum, the Greenbelt historic district (a National Landmark) holds events such as the “Retro Town Fair” and “Hometown Heroes” dance performance, offers walking tours, collects oral histories and presents some of the oral history via the Greenbelt Museum website. The museum hosts exhibits and collaboratively hosts a lecture series with the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ “Events,” Greenbelt Museum, accessed February 26, 2016, <https://greenbeltmuseum.org/education/>.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIGITAL DELIVERY FOR INTERPRETATION

Historic preservation is a field that documents the interaction of people with places over time. Places reflect their history, however that reflection may be disguised. As such, interpreting historic preservation requires communication about both the time aspects of history and the spatial aspects of history. Digital methods of interpretation are well suited to communicating spatial and temporal information concurrently.⁶⁰ A few digital tools have been developed for interpreting history, such as Curatescape, VisualEyes, Neatline, and the web publishing platform Omeka.⁶¹ Many digital tools have been adapted to the needs of historical interpretation such as ArcGIS, Story Maps, CartoDB, and the web publishing platform WordPress.⁶² However, most of these methods are fairly new tools of historic preservation. This section and case study examines ways to apply digital tools to interpreting historic districts to demonstrate some of the capabilities of using digital delivery methods as elements within the comprehensive interpretation model.

In today's Web 2.0 world, interactivity has become standard and expected. "Expectations are growing that everyone could and should arrange, direct, produce, curate, comment and upload on any and all means of cultural production. This includes the interpretation of our shared and

⁶⁰ For recent scholarship on spatial history see: David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, eds. *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Ian N. Gregory and Alistair Geddes, *Toward Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS and Spatial History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Todd Presner, et al., *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Anne Kelly Knowles, ed., *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship*, (Redlands CA: ESRI press, 2008).

⁶¹ "Curatescape, A web and mobile app for curating the landscape," Curatescape, accessed April 7, 2016 <http://curatescape.org/>; "VisualEyes" Shanti Interactive, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.viseyes.org/>; "Neatline: Plot your course in space and time," Scholars Lab, accessed April 7, 2016 <http://neatline.org/>; and "Omeka," Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://omeka.org/>.

⁶² "ArcGIS Online," ArcGIS, accessed April 7, 2016, <https://www.arcgis.com/features/>; "Story Maps," ArcGIS, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/>; "CartoDB: Map your world's data," CartoDB, <https://cartodb.com/>; and "WordPress: Create a free website or blog" WordPress, <https://wordpress.com/>.

personal histories.”⁶³ Wireless internet and cellular data have made it possible to access websites with mobile devices or laptop computers in a wide variety of places. Location aware mobile apps directly connect content to the user’s physical location. Using digital delivery for interpreting historic districts can reach multiple audiences and makes a variety of information and participation options available to people on and offsite.

Maximizing digital delivery

Changing the way people access information also changes the way people use information. Methods of delivering information digitally are shaping new ways of gathering, processing, compiling and producing information from source materials. In this case Marshall McLuhan’s argument that “the medium is the message” is fitting.⁶⁴ Changing the form of delivery can change the way information is viewed and understood. In *Interpreting Cultural and Natural Resources*, the authors argue that “finding the best outlet for the story helps maximize its impact.”⁶⁵ Sometimes the best outlet is using several different methods. Using different media gives both the interpreter and the audience multiple ways to explore information and generate meaning to furthering understanding.

Digital “outlets” or delivery systems abound. In *Computers, Visualizations and History*, David Staley discusses a vast array of digital media available to study history and develop historical interpretation.⁶⁶ From hypertext and image galleries, to videos and virtual reality, the media possibilities are nearly endless. The interpreter needs to choose delivery methods that make the most of the strengths of the source material. For example, data heavy sources like census

⁶³ Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User Generated World*, (Philadelphia PA: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 17.

⁶⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Signet Books, 1964.

⁶⁵ Knudson, Cable and Beck, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, 192

⁶⁶ David Staley, *Computers, Visualizations and History*, 2nd ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2014, New York: Routledge 2015).

records may not be good for making videos, but they could be used in mapping to show changes in population in an area over time.

A website can serve as a vessel for multiple digital outlets included as modules or components within that website. As digital technology becomes more mobile and users access internet resources through mobile devices, it is important to recognize that in order to reach the broadest audience, a website should be compatible with mobile devices. There are three main approaches to mobile compatibility. One version is to design a specific app. Apps are very well suited to location aware data, utilizing the mobile device's camera function, and for sending notifications.⁶⁷ There are two main problems with an app: for the creator apps require specialized development for each mobile operating system, and for audiences, the user has to know about the app and to download it before they can use it, which typically requiring a certain level of planning ahead. The second approach, and a favorite of bloggers, is the "mobile version." This compatibility mode is triggered when the site senses the small size of the screen on which content is viewed. Mobile versions are optimized for small screen size and, ideally, optimized for readability. The problems caused by mobile versions are the loss of features and redirecting to a mobile site URL. Most mobile versions cut menus or remove features to streamline the mobile version making it difficult to utilize certain parts of the site. Redirection can cause problems for sharing links and for ranking sites in a web search.⁶⁸ The third version is a "responsive" website where the whole site adjusts to the size of the screen or window. Typically this is done by shrinking images and stacking menus and items as the screen gets smaller. This makes it readable and

⁶⁷ Brian Honigman, "How to decide between a responsive website or a native mobile app," *Design&Dev, The Next Web*, February 8, 2014, <http://tnw.to/b2aOO>.

⁶⁸ Rupert Breheny, Edward Jung, and Matt Zürrer, "Responsive Design – harnessing the power of media queries," *Google Webmaster Central Blog*, April 30, 2012, <https://webmasters.googleblog.com/2012/04/responsive-design-harnessing-power-of.html>

functional on a mobile device as well as on a regular computer screen. Using a responsive website makes a site more user friendly to mobile users while preventing features from being lost. The problems with a responsive website is that they uses more data than a mobile version or an app, and some responsive templates can limit layout options for information on the full size version of the website.⁶⁹

Digital Storytelling

The forms of storytelling available online are very nearly endless. “The forms that knowledge assumes can no longer be considered givens.”⁷⁰ Text, image, audio, visual, spatial, temporal, automatic or interactive, each form has a digital means of production. Digital storytelling can play an important role in the everyday “real world.” In the book *Digital_Humanities* the authors discuss the role of digital technology in humanities scholarship. They argue that scholarship has become ubiquitous and state that “researchers can curate, narrate, annotate and augment physical landscapes, the boundaries of inside and outside have become fluid”⁷¹ The authors also argue that mobile digital technology has blurred the lines between the academy and the public, “insiders” and “outsiders” by democratizing scholarship. This is an optimistic view which overlooks the fact that high speed access to mobile digital technology is cost prohibitive to a significant portion of the population. However, similarly to radio and television, the cost of digital technology continues to decrease, making it available to increasingly wider segments of the population. If this trend continues and digital technology, particularly mobile technology, becomes ubiquitous, then digital methods of delivery will continue to reach broader audiences.

⁶⁹ Breheny, Jung and Zürer, “Responsive Design”

⁷⁰ Anne Burdick et. al., *Digital_Humanities*, (Cambridge MA: MIT press, 2012), 58.

⁷¹ Burdick et. al. *Digital_Humanities*, 46

Understanding audiences for digital media

Understanding the audiences of a digital project involves both quantitative and qualitative information. Quantitative information on website usage and user interaction is possible through programs known as software analytics. Analytics in a broad sense is the analysis of data patterns. For websites, software analytics are programs that analyze data recorded by code tags in a website that record clicks, page views, scrolling actions, etc. and reports patterns on how users interact with the website. Google Analytics is one of the most well-known web analytics has both a free and a paid version of their proprietary analytics software that is well utilized by a wide variety of websites. Piwik and Open Web Analytics are open source analytics programs – free, modifiable and developed openly with few licensing restrictions. The choice of web publishing platform can influence which analytics software to use. For example, WordPress has excellent support for Google Analytics which makes it very easy to use. Using the information from analytics, the interpreter can figure out which areas are most often visited, longest viewed, most often clicked and so on. This allows the interpreter to adjust the interpretive material in such a way to encourage more interaction, or to place the most important information where it is most likely to be seen and read rather than passed over.

Qualitative information about the users of a digital project is key to understanding the needs, wants and interests of audiences. This information requires communication between the user and the interpreter. Two ways to communicate with audiences and gather qualitative information about their needs are by asking questions and by building community. Asking questions can be as informal as simply requesting feedback or as formal as a study. how the audience interacts with the materials. Informal feedback directly from users of digital tools is helpful for gaining direct insight into the way audiences interact with the material and for

addressing bugs. Asking questions tends to be focused more on the materials whereas community building, focuses on the audience. This approach is oriented toward the “membership” building model proposed by John Durel and Anita Nowery Durel.⁷² They propose that large numbers of casual visitors are not as important to the support of historic sites as “members.” Membership shows a higher level of interest in and commitment to the purpose and the goals of the site by choosing to identify themselves with the site as part of a group. Using this model for historic district by no means excludes non-residents. Individuals are free to choose the level of “membership” in a historic district by the amount participation and time they choose to invest in the group. Interpreters can expand the groups beyond the interpretive material by engaging audiences through social media.

Participating in digitally mediated dialogs

Social media is an important way for interpreters to engage with audiences. In addition to encouraging “membership,” social media provides a means of two-way communication between the interpreter and audience over time which provides a sense of community. Rather than simply allowing a static version of the interpretive material to speak for itself, engaging audience regularly through online communication keeps the audience engaged, interacting and contributing to a conversation. Social media platforms include networking sites such as Facebook, content sharing sites such as Instagram and YouTube, and blogs or micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter. Dialog facilitated by social media has become widely accepted and utilized by public, private and non-profit organizations. In a study on the social media use by public relations specialists, DiStaso, McCorkindale and Wright, found that many organizations value social media platforms as channels for connecting with stakeholders in order to facilitate two-way communication,

⁷² John Durel and Anita Nowery Durel, *A Golden Age for Historic Properties*. (Washington DC: Durel Consulting Partners and Qm2. 2007).

understand target audiences, and to encourage a positive perception of the organization by stakeholders and the public.⁷³ Alison Hinchman, associate director of marketing for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, points out older strategies, such as mailing newsletters, are becoming less effective tactics for developing membership.⁷⁴ Hinchman argues that organizations cannot rely solely on older methods communication and must learn to utilize social media in order to communicate to broader audiences and encourage participation and membership.⁷⁵ In *Interpreting Cultural and Natural Resources*, the authors state that “quality interpretation seeks to reach the whole of the clientele – on site and at home.”⁷⁶ Developing and sustaining social media accounts on multiple platforms is an important way of participating in dialog with audiences through digital media and allows the audience to remain involved even while not being physically present.

⁷³Marcia DiStaso, Tina McCorkindale, and Donald Wright, “How public relations executives perceive and measure the impact of social media in their organizations.” *Public Relations Review*, 37, (2011). 325-328.

⁷⁴ Alison Hinchman, “Social Media Challenges for Preservation Organizations.” *Forum News* 17 no. 3 (2010): para.1, <http://www.preservationnation.org/forum/library/public-articles/social-media-challenges-for.html>

⁷⁵ Alison Hinchman, “Social Media Challenges,” para.6

⁷⁶ Knudson, Cable and Beck, *Interpreting Cultural and Natural Resources*, 151.

CHAPTER 5:

CASE STUDY OF DIGITAL METHODS FOR INTERPRETATION:

LAYNE CREST, MUNCIE, INDIANA

OVERVIEW OF THE DISTRICT⁷⁷

Layne Crest is a mid-century subdivision that exemplifies the growth and change to neighborhoods in Muncie during the 1960s. Layne Crest is currently (April, 2016) being considered for designation to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district by the Muncie Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation Commission. The subdivision is representative of national development and change reflected on a local level. Layne Crest meets National Register Criterion A⁷⁸ as a local example of the broad patterns of social history, community planning, and development, because of its location, curvilinear plan, and the retention of form over the past fifty years.

Layne Crest is in the initial stages of the designation process, and although a survey, history and a case for the significance of the subdivision were completed as part of the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, the area has not been extensively studied beyond that. No other interpretive materials have been developed for the subdivision at this time. Layne Crest is a relatively small subdivision with 144 houses in approximately 35 acres located in the northwest quadrant of the city of Muncie, Indiana. In addition to its small size and self-contained plan, the need for interpretive materials to be developed made Layne Crest a good candidate for applying the digital elements of the comprehensive interpretive model.

⁷⁷ Information on the Layne Crest District is from the Draft of the National Register of Historic Places Nomination form prepared as a student project by Margaux Dever and Rebekah Williamson, November 2014.

⁷⁸ “Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.” 36 CFR § 60.4.

OVERVIEW OF THE LAYNE CREST INTERPRETATION PROJECT

http://madever.iweb.bsu.edu/layne_crest/⁷⁹

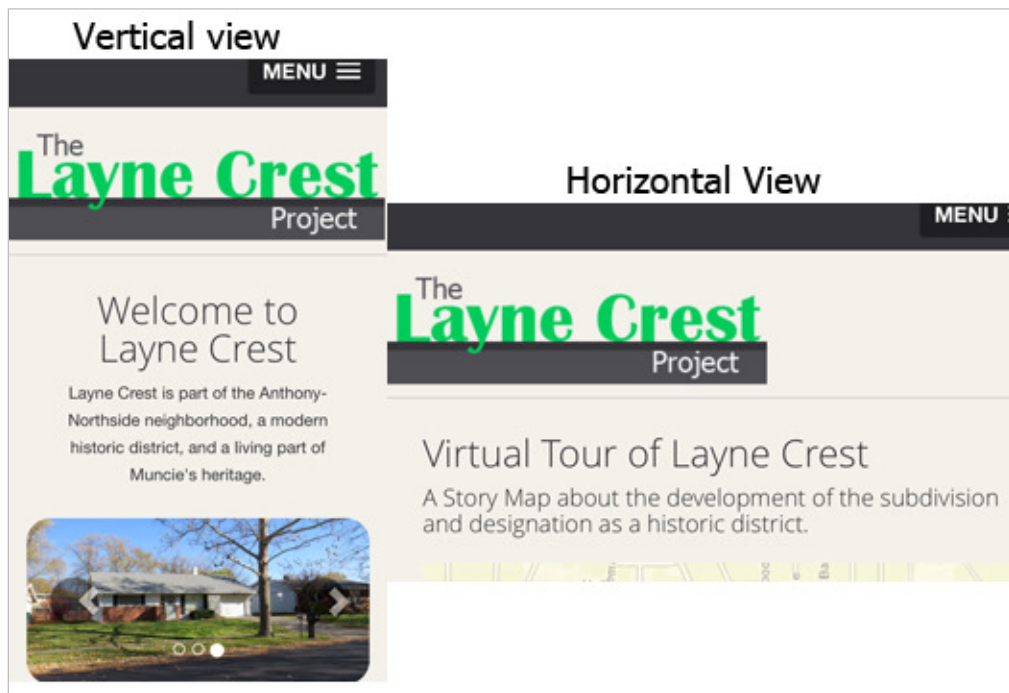
The Layne Crest interpretation project is a multi-media website that presents historical information about Layne Crest in a variety of formats. Each of these formats use a combination of visual and narrative storytelling in order to make the information approachable to verbal and visual learners alike. The site has modules with writing, photographs, graphics, interactive mapping, and video. The modules include a variety of source material, including: archival photographs, data from public records, original photography, historical resource surveys, oral history, and contributed narrative. The modules are a small representative sampling of narrative, visual, and spatial digital elements. By incorporating these elements in cooperation, the website harnesses the strengths of each form in order to communicate most effectively. The sections below walk through the interpretive materials included in the website in order from left to right, top to bottom as the pages appear in the top menu of the site.

Format

The Layne Crest website is built on a free creative commons licensed template. The site uses HTML5 which is the current standard format for displaying content on the World Wide Web, and Bootstrap, an open source web development software for responsive websites. The website is “responsive” and adjusts to the size of the user’s screen or window in order to make the most of all features on multiple devices, from small mobile screens to desktop computer monitors (see figure 4.1).

⁷⁹ The location of the website will change when Ball State University ends their affiliation with iweb. To view the website without iweb, download the .zip file included with the Thesis.

Figure 5.1: Layne Crest Interpretive Project website, mobile screen views

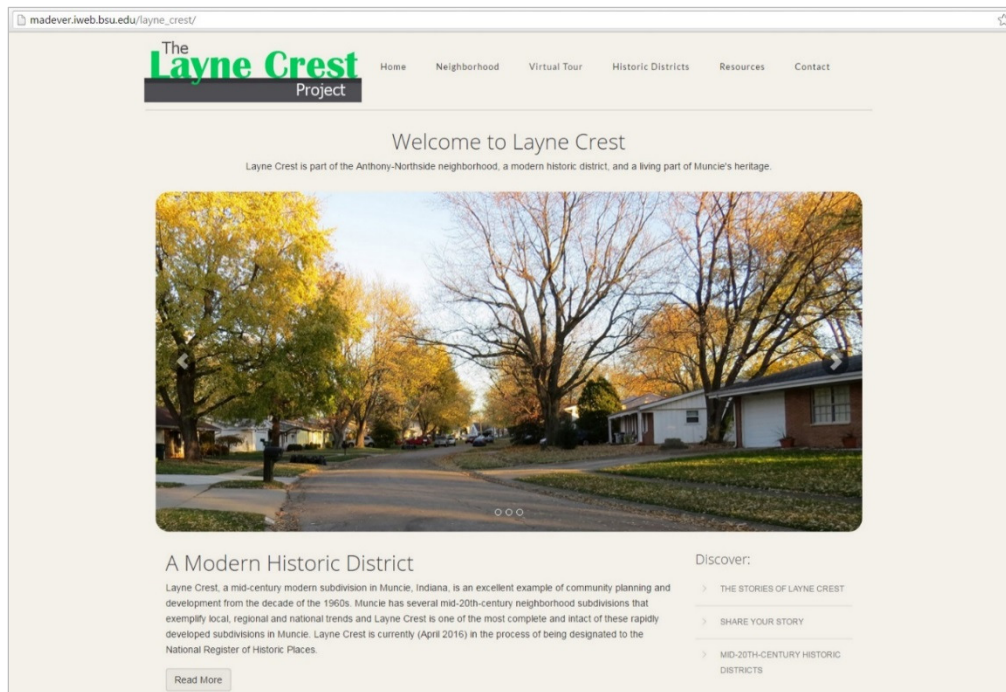


Home

The “home” page or opening page, of a website sets the tone for the entire site. A good first impression is important to keep people interested and reading. The Layne Crest website has both images and narrative on the home page, introducing the format for later pages to the user. The home page serves as both an anchor for the site and a jumping off point. The home page of the Layne Crest interpretation project has a menu across the top that remains consistent throughout the site. Informal feedback from 20 users of the site, ranging in ages from 16 to 71, indicated that the consistent top menu bar made the site as a whole easily navigable and provided a sense of continuity across the site.⁸⁰ Arranging content within a consistent format with clear labels helps users to be able to find information on the site.

⁸⁰ Feedback on layout, navigation, preferred features, likes and dislikes sought from 20 friends and family members, ages 16-71, 5 residents of Muncie and the rest residents of other cities. April 6-7, 2016.

Figure 5.2: Layne Crest Interpretive Project website, home page



Neighborhood

The “Neighborhood” section of the Layne Crest website has strongly narrative content. Telling the stories about historic places is central to helping people understand, appreciate and protect them. Within the “Stories” section of the website there are three modules: History of Layne Crest, Featured Stories, and the Blog.

History

The history portion uses narrative and digital copies of historic photographs to present historical information on Layne Crest and its development. Narrative is a typical form for history and is a familiar way to share historical information. Historic photographs are more than illustrations and are primary sources in their own right. Incorporating historic images with the narrative history gives visual reference to the narrative.

Featured Stories

The featured stories page of the stories section includes written stories and oral histories on video from Muncie residents sharing their thoughts and memories about living in Muncie and in the Layne Crest subdivision. Stories shared by individuals with experience of a place, time, or event, personalize history for audiences. When history is personalized it becomes more relatable, building connections between history and the audience's experience, which in turn facilitates understanding.⁸¹ The central goal of interpreting historic districts is the protection of historic resources through understanding and appreciation. Therefore, encouraging audiences to make connections between their experiences and the history of Layne Crest in ways that develop understanding and appreciation for Layne Crest advances that goal. Including video within the website serves to make the pages more dynamic with the goal of making the website more engaging. In addition, using video to share these oral histories rather than transcripts or audio recordings, can also increase the audience's ability to relate to the storyteller by including the storyteller's facial expressions and gestures.

Blog

The final portion of the stories section is a blog. The blog is a format for sharing written content and provides a means of two way communication between an author and readers via the comments section. Comments, unlike emails, are visible to all readers of the site and are a method for users of the site to participate in a larger conversation. The blog is also a bridge between the site and social media giving both the author and the reader the chance to share content through other channels. Participation through comments or by sharing content via social media builds a

⁸¹ Knudson, Cable, Beck, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, 324.

multiple audiences. The user feedback indicated that the “virtual tour” was a popular feature of the website.

The virtual tour maps the location of Layne Crest within Muncie, shows aerial photographs from stages of the subdivision’s development and shows the district as it is today. The user can interact by selecting, scrolling and paging through the written narrative; moving, zooming and selecting portions of the maps; and the user can click on map markers to see information about the houses in the district. The significance of Layne Crest lies in its location, plan and the retention of form in both the houses and landscape over the past 50 years. The capabilities of the Story Map make it possible to highlight these features by including narrative and images together with the spatial information. In “Narrating Place and Space,” David Bodenhamer states that the interactive nature of digital mapping “moves the user from observer to experiencer.”⁸³ As the user interacts with the site by choosing where to click and what to select, they become an active participant in the interpretive process and thereby facilitate learning.

Historic Districts

This section presents information on National Register of Historic Places historic districts, local and National Register districts in Muncie and historic districts with mid-20th century resources. All four web pages under the “historic districts” heading have a strongly narrative focus which centers on explanations of concepts relating to historic districts.

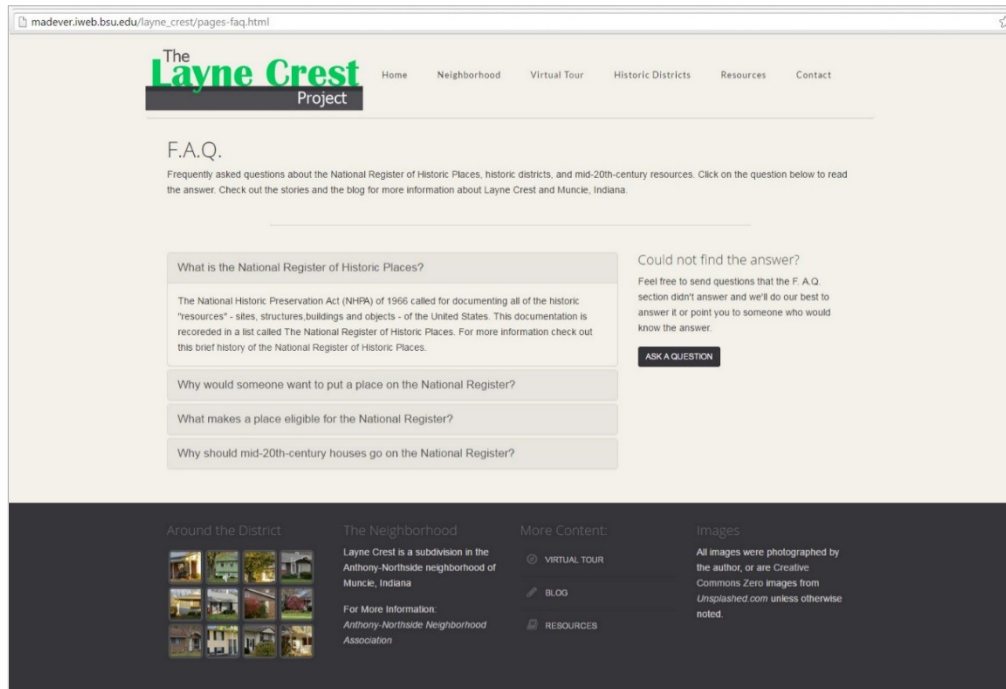
Frequently Asked Questions

The first module of the historic districts section is a page of frequently asked questions (F.A.Q.) with answers that provides some basic answers about historic districts. The F.A.Q section serves as an entry point for audiences that are unfamiliar with historic preservation. This section

⁸³ David Bodenhamer, “Narrating Place and Space,” in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 23.

is predominantly narrative, but the page is arranged so that it poses a question and the user has to click for an answer, encouraging interaction. These basic answers link to pages or other resources that discuss the topic further. There is also a link to the contact page for a user to contact the interpreter to ask a question that is not included in the F.A.Q. list.

Figure 5.4: Layne Crest Interpretive Project website, F.A.Q. page



National Register of Historic Places

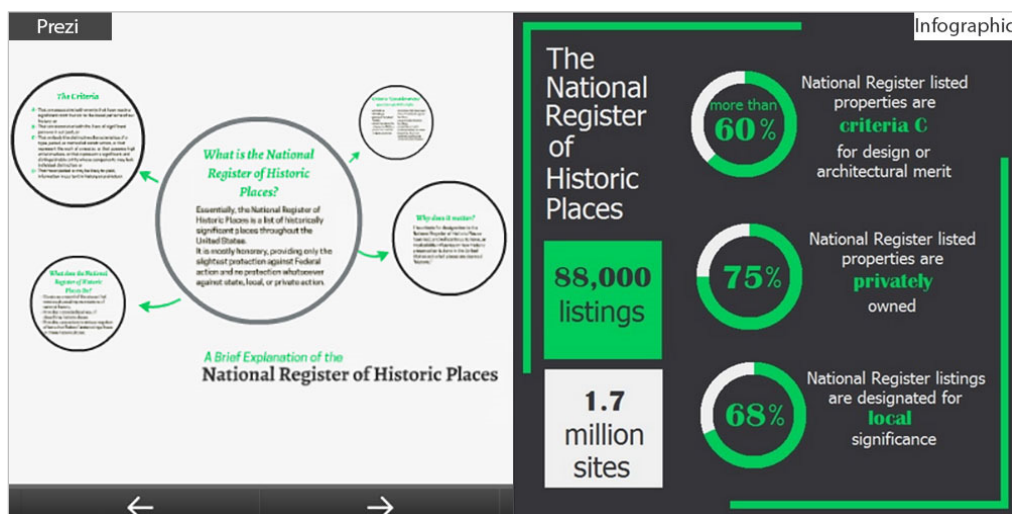
The National Register of Historic Places section is a combination of narrative and visualizations. According to David Staley in *Computers, Visualizations and History*, “a visualization is any graphic that organizes meaningful information in multi-dimensional spatial form.”⁸⁴ The first of the visualizations is an interactive component that uses spatial and narrative elements called a “Prezi.”⁸⁵ A Prezi is an interactive presentation that allows the user to click and

⁸⁴ Staley, *Computers Visualizations and History*, xi

⁸⁵ “Prezi: Presentation Software | online Presentation Tools.” Prezi, accessed April 4, 2016. <https://prezi.com>.

zoom around a digital poster. Prezis are spatially, rather than sequentially organized and are well suited for illustrating the big picture concepts and highlighting the relationships between concepts. The Prezi briefly explains what the National Register of Historic Places is, what the criteria are, and ties this information into the influence of the National Register of Historic Places on the way preservation is done in the United States. This section also includes an infographic with statistic information on the size, scope and types of properties designated to the National Register of Historic Places. Infographics provide a visually appealing format for statistical information and presents the data in an approachable manner.

Figure 5.5: Layne Crest Interpretive Project, “Prezi” and infographic



The narrative portion of this page fills in the details that were not included in the Prezi or the infographic. Although the visualizations and the narrative each present different information, each piece works together to provide the user with a more complete understanding of the National Register of Historic Places. The Prezi and infographic highlight important concepts and the narrative provides greater depth for users that want further details. The narrative portion of the

page provides information on the history of the National Register of Historic Places, information about its function, and the definition of a National Register “historic district.”

The mid-20th-Century Historic Districts page includes historic photographs and narrative. This page is dedicated to presenting the importance of documenting, protecting and investing in “midcentury” resources developed between approximately 1945 and 1965. Resources that have recently crossed the 50 year “historic” line were built or developed within living memory of many people which can lead to a bias that these resources are less “historic” than older resources. The modern aesthetic of mid-20th-century sites can be off-putting to some preservationists, particularly because much of the modernist movement was dismissive or hostile to the architecture of its past.⁸⁶ And yet, mid-20th-century sites and resources still reflect an important part of our history and heritage that is worth documenting, learning from and preserving.

The final page in the historic district section introduces historic districts in Muncie. This page includes an introduction to the development of the Muncie Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation Commission, starting with the demolition of the Delaware County Courthouse in 1966. A historic photograph of the demolition is included with the narrative to provide an understanding of the massive size of the 1885 court house and the visual impact of the demolition on downtown Muncie. The rest of the page introduces the historic districts of Muncie and includes a contemporary photograph of Muncie’s first historic district, the Emily Kimbrough Historic District, and an interactive map of Muncie with each of the historic districts highlighted. Layne Crest is included on the map to contrast the location of the mid-20th-century subdivision with the other historic districts located closer to downtown.

⁸⁶ Richard Longstreeth, “I Can’t See it; I Don’t Understand It; and It Doesn’t Look Old to Me,” *Forum Journal*, 27 no. 1 (2012): 35-45.

Resources

This section contains two pages. The first page is a bibliography that provides references and links to source material. Bibliographic references to journal articles or webpages are hyperlinked to the repository or webpage for the convenience of the user. The second page is a “link library” that provides links to social media, such as the Lost Muncie group on Facebook, and to websites that have related information such as the Delaware County Historical Society. The links in both the bibliography and the link library connect the web page to source material available online which frames the interpretive material of the website within the context of other online resources. Libraries, archives and publishers have responded, and continue to respond, to the “digital turn” by making digital versions of their collections available online. The internet provides exceptional access to information, almost regardless of location. By including links to articles and online resources as part of the bibliography, the user can do their own “fact checking” and follow up on the information if they so choose. The link library places the Layne Crest interpretation website in context of other organizations, projects, and groups that are studying and exploring the history of Muncie.

Contact

The final page of the Layne Crest website is a contact form. The form is another way for the website user to communicate with the interpreter. The contact form is more private and potentially more personal than the comment section included with the blog. A contact form allows a person to ask a question without being required to do so in a public setting where anyone could answer. A contact form is also a safe way for the interpreter to get direct verbal feedback without providing an email address which could end up being spammed. Communication and feedback loops are very important for community oriented projects because it gives audience members a

chance to participate and shape the further development of the project. The introduction to the contact form states that it can be used to ask questions, make comments, or to contribute a story to the project.

Although presented in a linear manner, the website can be read, viewed and interacted with in any order. The user does not need to follow any fixed path through the website. Each of these pages is accessible through the buttons or drop down lists from the top menu of the site which remains consistent across all the pages. There are also links located elsewhere on the pages, such as within the text and in the footer menu, that connect the various pages to one another so that navigation through the top menu is not necessary at all times.

CONCLUSION

Historic districts, both local historic districts and National Register historic districts, are important tools for preserving the built environment and protecting historic places. Despite challenges facing historic districts, preservationists can help the public understand the value of historic districts through interpretation. Communicating their value to a broad audience is made more comprehensive and effective by developing and implementing digital methods and tools for interpreting historic districts.

As more historic districts employ multiple methods to interpret their resources, further research could reexamine interpretive best practices in order to develop best practices specifically designed for historic districts. Further research on digital methods of delivering historical interpretation could examine which tools, approaches and platforms are most effective for communicating the value of historic places to audiences. Audience –specific research could be done to better understand what audiences are being reached and how to effectively reach underserved populations.

Historic districts exist because they represent something significant to the community. Interpreting historic districts in a way that is broadly inclusive of community audiences and visitors helps raise awareness about the value of historic districts. The model for interpreting historic districts comprehensively presented in this thesis can be adapted to suit the place-specific needs of many kinds of historic districts. Using digital methods in conjunction with other interpretive methods broadens the reach of interpretation and provides channels for community participation from audiences both on and off site. Encouraging participation and public contribution to the stories we tell about historic resources creates a sense of ownership in the interpretation process, leading to the understanding, appreciation and protection that historic districts need.

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